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Observe Your Mind

Are you constantly in motion? Most people I encounter are busy from the time they get out of bed in the morning until they crawl back in at night. This busyness is not just physical. It is also mental. Even when we are sitting still, our minds are racing. Our thoughts stream at warp speed as we revisit past events and generate fearful possibilities. Simultaneously, we entertain a running commentary, “Why did she wear *that*? Who does he think he is? Are they talking about me? I need more money for that new phone. I’m better qualified for that job than she is.” Endless, isn’t it?

Did you know that the average person thinks anywhere between 1,000 to 2,500 thoughts an hour? We rarely give our minds a rest. The question is, how many of our thoughts help us to create the lives we want and how many hinder us? If you take the time to observe closely, you may be surprised to find that far too many of the thoughts you focus on are holding you back.

Since I am asking you to be honest, I choose to be truthful with you about my personal journey. So here goes...

In 2002, I hit a tipping point. I was bored in my job even though I was successfully climbing the corporate ladder. My personal relationships felt disappointing. I was financially pinched, worrying that my family would never get ahead. On December 15, 2002, I entered a new realm of responsibility. My first child, Margaret, was born. She had bright pink lips and a sweet, round Nigerian-American face. She was absolutely beautiful. My husband and I fell in love with Maggie instantly. However, we faced immediate challenges. We remained in the hospital for a full week because she had difficulty breathing. Those days put us on edge.

When we got her home, I assumed everything was fine. But three months later, during a routine doctor appointment we were told, “Your daughter needs a specialist immediately: She has floppy baby syndrome.” Those words set off months of testing. Our daughter’s condition brought uncertainty. We learned that while some children outgrew this condition, many others were never able to walk or talk. They could never develop the independence to lead normal lives.

This diagnosis pushed me to the verge of a breakdown. I had always considered myself a very optimistic person by nature – I am quick to share a smile. I see the glass as half-full rather than half-empty. However, the anxiety and dread I felt about my daughter’s future put me over the edge. In desperation, I cried out for Help.

I just love how the Universe brings us the things we need at just the right time. I “happened” to pick up a book that had one simple but profound idea. It was this: “In every moment you can choose either a thought of fear or a thought of love. Your choice will determine whether you create a life full of fear and suffering or one full of love and joy.” That idea struck me at my core. I decided that I would begin to watch my thoughts closely to see what I might find.

I was shocked to discover that the overwhelming majority of my thoughts were fear-based. And I was a positive person! After this revelation, I began to observe my thoughts as often and as closely as I could. I began noting down on paper what I found. Here are a few examples:

“I’m not a good enough wife or mother. I am a failure. I don’t accomplish enough in a day.”

“What is going to happen to Maggie? What if she never walks? Will she have trouble in school? What if she experiences hardship as an adult?”

“Am I going to be stuck in this job forever? I hate this job. I just can’t stand going to this place anymore.”

“What if I can’t pay my bills this month?”

“I am angry that people don’t take the time to offer me friendship in the way I offer it to them.”

There were positive thoughts in my mind too. But I saw that on a regular basis my thinking turned to fear, worry and self-doubt. WOW. What a discovery. At first I was ashamed and saddened by what I saw. Then I realized the power of what I had uncovered—I was FINALLY AWARE of why I felt so upset. I had exposed the root causes of my turbulent emotions. I began to notice a direct connection between certain thoughts and the emotions and physical feelings that accompanied them.

Observation is a POWERFUL tool. With observation comes awareness. With awareness comes the power to change.

Since you can’t change what you aren’t aware of, I recommend that you begin to make use of your “Observer”. Your Observer is that ever-present aspect of yourself that can look into your mind and watch what you are thinking. Have you noticed that while you are talking with someone you are also thinking thoughts unrelated to the conversation and there is a part of you that can monitor all of it? That is your Observer at work.

I suggest you use this Observer in a new role – as your helper and friend. The Observer is at your disposal 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The Observer can lead you to an understanding of your patterns of thinking and feeling. These patterns are deeply engrained habits.

Our thoughts are like a computer program running in our mind. We tend to allow them to cycle through again and again on auto-pilot. The programs developed subtly as we internalized messages from our parents, our teachers and society. Without questioning these inputs, we formed unconscious beliefs about ourselves and our lives.

These deep-seated beliefs about yourself and your place in life generate your thoughts. Your thoughts trigger your emotions. Your emotions lead to the physical action (or lack thereof) you take in your daily life. So, if you want to bring about major change, you need to get an understanding of the underlying beliefs that direct you. Watching your thoughts is a great place to start. The Observer in you will help you do this.

Why not start here:

1. Observe your self-talk. What do you think and say about yourself? What aspects of yourself do you like? What do you judge and criticize? When you expose thoughts of self-doubt and self-hatred, be grateful. They lead you to dismantle the patterns of self-sabotage that limit you.
2. Observe your fears. Write these down on paper in detail so you can see them clearly. Pay attention to negative emotions that you feel throughout the day. What was the thought that preceded the way you felt? If you want to feel emotionally and physically better more of the time, you need to understand the thoughts that are causing you to feel bad emotionally.

3. Notice what percentage of time your thoughts are focused in the past or the future rather than the present. The past was a present moment that already happened and the future is a present moment that has not yet occurred. Most of us miss the present—the only moment we have power to change.

That's plenty to get you started. Put your Observer to work full-time this week. Get a journal, a notebook or even one sheet of paper and write down your observations. You are going to notice patterns quickly. You are going to begin to see opportunities to modify your thinking.

Will you put these ideas into practice? *BEWARE IF YOU DO!* You will learn, change and grow. You will begin to experience a process of profound transformation that you might never have dreamed possible.

(One last note, it is my joy to begin a second year of writing for Allure. I renew my commitment to each of you to help uncover the gem that you are by pointing you back to yourself.)

Food For Thought

“We are shaped by our **thoughts**; we become what we think. When the mind is pure, joy follows like a shadow that never leaves.”

Buddha

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Patricia Omoqui is an internationally recognized inspirational speaker, life coach and writer. Patricia's mission in life is to inspire people to move beyond fear so they can reach their full potential.

To share your thoughts about this article, please email Patricia at allure@patriciaomoqui.com or visit her at her website: www.patriciaomoqui.com .